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A Better Way Forward: Research On Media And Violence In The Pacific

Pacific researchers exploring the relationship between violence, media and their societies, are likely to be disappointed by the media-violence debate in the West which is characterised by inconclusiveness and a type of intellectual poverty which Pacific researchers would do well to avoid. This article suggests that in analysing the media's possible role in engendering violence, we are not simply concerned with representations of conflict and violence in the media. Rather, we may find that representations far removed from social turmoil can engender knowledges conducive to violence.

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As modern forms of media arrive in the Pacific, so too do anxieties about how these media -- and the instantaneous and continuous cultural exposure which they enable -- will impact on societies and cultures that have been relatively isolated. Although many metropolitan centres in the Pacific have received international television services for some years now, the penetration of these services into remote regions within the Pacific nations, combined with the arrival of new media forms, has renewed concerns for many.

At a conference on global communications in Oceania, held in New Caledonia in December 1997, there was much discussion of the changes which television was already bringing to communities in the Pacific and speculation on the likely implications of internet accessed multimedia services on traditional political, economic and cultural modes.¹ The undermining of traditional authority structures was at the forefront of these concerns, but the question of the impact of violent material on traditional societies was also explored. As social dislocation has already precipitated an upsurge of violence in Pacific states, violence in internet accessible computer games was considered a worrying development.

In general, Pacific researchers exploring the relationship between violence, media and their societies, are likely to be disappointed by the media-violence debate in the West which is characterised by inconclusiveness and a type of intellectual poverty which Pacific researchers would do well to avoid. This article begins with a brief discussion of the main deficiencies in the media-violence debate in the West as a starting point for proposing what I believe is a better way forward.

The media have frequently been implicated in the promotion of violence. Government reports, academic opinion and popular logic have attested to a strong, causal relationship between media viewing and individual and group acts of violence. This weight of opinion has lent credence to calls for bureaucratic intervention in such forms as V-chips, program warnings and tighter censorship controls. The objective of such interventions is to diminish access to violent media material, preferably by those considered most vulnerable to its pernicious influence such as children.²

Much of the research underpinning such conclusions is highly Eurocentric and its results therefore questionable in a 'community' as culturally diverse as that of the Pacific. Further, the validity of such results is questioned by many Western media researchers who argue that a simple cause-effect relationship between representations of violence in the media and violence in society is untenable (Barker and Petley 1997; Zillmann et al 1994). They argue that individuals or groups engage in violence for complex reasons that require scrutiny of the broader social context within which violence occurs; that elevating the media to the status of sole culprit renders it a scapegoat for more endemic social influences (Vine 1997:136-7).

The media-violence debate is also simplistic in its preoccupation with analysing representations of violence. The presumption is that these are the most likely types of representation to have deleterious social consequences. But is it only violence that begets violence, or do other aspects of media content deserve scrutiny? The impasse may foster research within the regional media-violence debate that avoids the blind alleys and spurious assumptions and theories that have underpinned much of the debate in the West.

One lesson from the post-war 'media effects' debate in the West is that it is dangerous to assume that people read media texts similarly across different cultural groupings. Rather, particular societies, or indeed groups within those societies, read texts

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differently to varying degrees (see Durkin: 1985, Young: 1990, GMG: 1976, 1980). An understanding of the effects of media texts therefore requires an appreciation of the specific cultural milieu in which they are read. For this reason, one cannot meaningfully analyse the effects of media representations of violence across a 'community' as broad and culturally and politically complex as that of the Pacific. What is required is an analysis of the effects on specific cultural communities, out of which might emerge some more general insights into the implications of media representations of violence in the region. My research on the New Caledonian media during the 1980s provides one example of the types of research which might progress an understanding of the part played by the media in a context of social violence.

The 1980s was, of course, a very violent period in New Caledonia's recent history. The local news media was stretched in its efforts to cover the range of confrontations occurring across the territory between pro and anti-independence activists. During the periods of acute conflict -- late 1984 to early 1985 and mid-1988 -- much of the television, radio and print news was taken up with reports of the violence. This was truly a context of turmoil, yet Western media research once again sheds little light on the possible role of the media in its production.

Most studies on media and violence have analysed the social effects of dramatised material -- movies, action dramas and cartoons. A few have incorporated news material in their analysis but the results of this research are inconclusive.³ Other studies on the relationships between news media and social violence have focused on what they argue is a symbiotic relationship between the news media and terrorist organisations (Schlesinger: 1991, Wieviorka and Wolton: 1987). But most studies on the social effects of news media have been concerned with a very different effect: the news media's role in assisting in the processes of social reproduction in industrialised societies.

A study by Ericson, Baranek and Chan is an example of this concern. They argue that the media assists in ensuring social reproduction by marginalising as deviant those who challenge the social order. Indeed, they describe journalists as a "deviance-defining elite" who act as "central agents in the reproduction of order" (1987:3). Their observations may be apt in their own social context where hegemony was generally well established, but are highly problematic in a context such as that of New Caledonia during the 1980s, which was a period of acute conflict where relations of domination came under serious challenge and where

tacit and symbolic violence were the prevailing norm. Did the news media play a role in the reproduction of this social disorder?

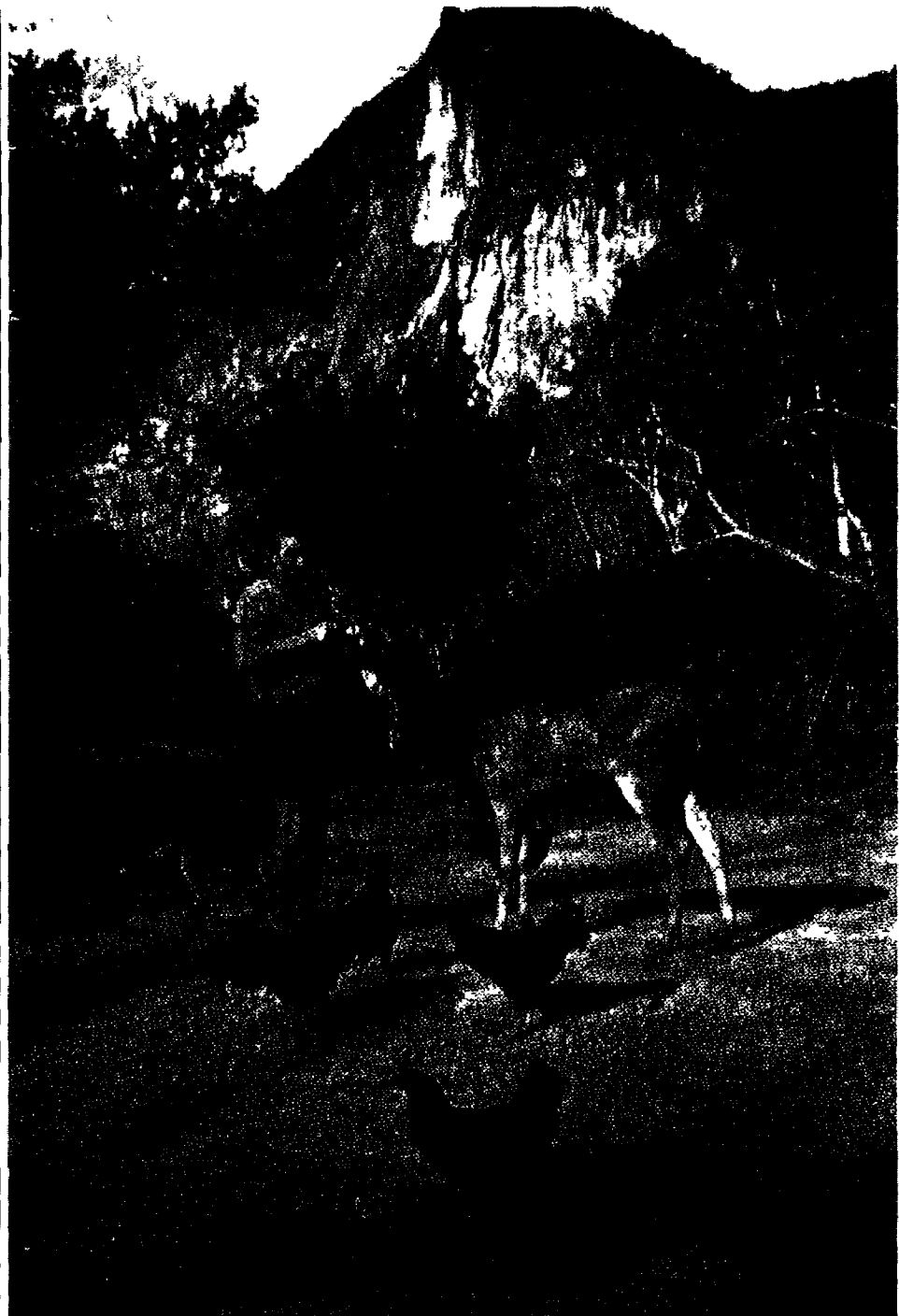
In responding to this question, I have attempted to avoid some of the traps, referred to above, that have imprisoned the media-violence debate for several decades. A standard line of inquiry in media studies to such bountiful examples of media representations of violence would be: How did the media report the violence? Was the reporting fair, objective, balanced or biased? This line of inquiry presupposes, of course, a benchmark against which objectivity can be assessed. Although the existence of such a benchmark is assumed by many journalists, broadcasters and others (including academics), the post-structuralist/postmodern shift in social science research has probably been most influential in its critique of the notions of objectivity and truth. The inroads of this thinking have shifted discussion of news media effects away from the investigation of such notions as bias and, instead, towards questions of representation (see Barrett 1991; Acland:1995).

Behind the concept of representation is the idea that the major discursive apparatuses in society, such as the media, construct people's concepts of reality through the ways that they represent it. This perspective views the news media as but one such apparatus, the relative power of which continues to be debated. The concerns of media studies therefore shift under this new paradigm, to an analysis of the different, and frequently competing, articulations of 'reality' presented in the media. These 'realities', although provisional, do have consequences. They are the knowledges out of which social agency is spawned. Although a good deal of the recent research in media studies and the social sciences generally has embraced this concept, it has yet to establish its impact on the media-violence debate.

The emphasis on the production of knowledge presents a new take on the media-violence debate. It means that, in analysing the media's possible role in engendering violence, we are not simply concerned with representations of conflict and violence in the media. Rather, we may find that representations far removed from social turmoil can engender knowledges conducive to violence. This point is repeatedly illustrated in the reporting in the New Caledonian daily newspaper, the anti-independence *Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* -- the only daily operating in the territory for most of the 1980s. It is most powerfully illustrated in a front-page photograph that appeared on 4 September 1987 under the heading 'The Caledonian serenity'.

I argue that the discourses expressed in the photo, as

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elsewhere in the newspaper, helped to legitimise some of the worst acts of violence perpetrated in the territory during the decade. The photo appeared less than two weeks prior to a highly contentious referendum on independence organised by the French government, at the time a conservative party led by the current President Jacques Chirac. It was a photo of a New Caledonian landscape denoted by a stretch of flat land with a mountain rising in the background and in the fore-ground a man surrounded by

chooks, a deer and a dog. The caption indicated that this photo was taken at the property of the retired couple George Weiss and his wife near Koumac towards the centre of the main island of New Caledonia. It commented on the peacefulness and harmony of the scene, which, it suggested, reflected '*la Calédonie profonde*' (the profound Caledonia). Moreover, the caption suggested that stumbling on such a serene scene had surprised the photographer.

What does this photo tell us of '*la Calédonie profonde*'? It is firstly a domesticated and a colonial scene. The land is cleared and the deer, which is not a native species but which has been imported since colonisation, grazes in its domesticated state. These marked traces of colonial conquest are presented as natural.

Marie-Louise Pratt has discussed the frequency of the panorama in travel writing and suggests that "the fantasy of dominance...[is] commonly built into this stance" (Mills 1991:78). Mills comments that this stance "recalls Foucault's work on the panopticon" which Foucault considered the ultimate mechanism of control in its ability to allow one person to oversee the activity and behaviour of many. This "fantasy of dominance" can also be seen in this scene of '*la Calédonie profonde*' which depicts the type of unfettered harmony which only complete domination can engender.

The "surprise" occurrence of capturing this scene, referred to by the caption writer, enhances its naturalness: it is there to be found, but at the same time its pervasiveness is insufficiently noticed, precisely because it is so unremarkable, so natural. Pratt argues that the task of colonial discourse is to: "... incorporate a particular reality into a series of interlocking information orders -- aesthetic, geographic, mineralogical, botanical, agricultural, economic, ecological, ethnographic, and so on. To the extent that it strives to efface itself, the invisible eye/I strives to make these informational orders natural, to find them there uncommanded, rather than assert them as the products/producers of European knowledges or disciplines" (Mills: 79). This particular 'reality' was also incorporated in the manner in which the inhabitants of this 'profound Caledonia' are described.

In 1984, an article reported on the visit of the French Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories, George Lemoine to a small remote farm in the mountains on the main island of New Caledonia. An old woman of European descent, whose husband had died, lived on the farm with her two sons. They lived a poor subsistence lifestyle but professed to be happy.

Lemoine was quoted as saying that "Caledonia, it's this house, this old woman who had two children with a canaque" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*: 20 October, 1984)⁴ The family was not only in harmony with their physical environment but also with

their sociological one, reflected in the fact that the woman had had "two children with a canaque".

The dream of 'pluri-ethnic' harmony was as implicit to this conception of '*la Calédonie profonde*' as was the dominance and domestication of the land, and is evident again in a comment by conservative Melanesian, Senator Maurice Nenou who said he spoke as "the voice of the true Caledonia, of this pluri-ethnic Caledonia about which some still think that two communities oppose each other" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*: 16 April, 1987). This articulation of the "true Caledonia" as solid, constant, reflective and unemotional recurs in this discourse. Violence played no part in this description of the "true Caledonia".

Jacques Lafleur, a prominent anti-independence politician described Caledonia as a "common good" and added that "we haven't the right, neither this group nor that, to force ourself upon it by violence" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 30 April, 1988).

If violence played no part in the "true Caledonia", how can it be argued that the anti-independence media, through its prominent enunciation of this discourse, contributed significantly towards violence in the territory? This depiction of '*la Calédonie profonde*' as organic evokes Wetherell and Potter's (1991) discussion of the use of this trope in Pakeha (non-Maori New Zealander) racist discourse. They argue that organic society is presented as curiously weightless and unenergised, but is given force precisely because it signifies a normative continuity with stability, cohesion and orderliness. This society is, in effect, full of latent power. In it, "Pakeha New Zealanders become inactive but legitimate, their power invisible and normative, while Maori groups become active and visibly energetic but, simultaneously, deviant" (Wetherell and Potter:159).

Those groups who disrupt the social order by producing "disintegrative tendencies" are considered dysfunctional and the product of inadequate socialisation. They are therefore pathological; they have no rightful role to play in a healthy social or psychological order (Wetherell and Potter: 158-161). Adequate socialisation occurs through assimilation which is inherent to the notion of pluri-ethnicity as it was articulated in anti-independence discourse and *Les Nouvelles*. Any claim to difference or separateness, and any rejection of the concept of pluri-ethnicity, earns the tag of deviancy and pathology. The 'true Caledonia' is a powerful schemata from which all those who profess difference can be excluded. And, because their difference confers not only social but psychological dysfunction, they can in some senses be treated as less than human and, therefore disposable, as a particularly violent incident which occurred in the territory in late 1984 illustrated.

On the evening of 5 December 1984, a group of 17 Kanaks,⁵ most of whom were returning to their community from a pro-independence meeting in the town of Hienghene on the north eastern coast of the main island of New Caledonia, were ambushed and gunned down by a group of settlers. Most of them were shot repeatedly as they attempted to flee when the two trucks in which they were travelling were forced to stop by a tree trunk placed across the road. Ten Kanaks were killed and four wounded.

The massacre occurred outside the house of a settler, Maurice Mitride, who became a suspect along with a group which *Les Nouvelles* described as a "clan of métis" (mixed-race clan). Mitride was arrested on 10 December, charged with premeditated murder and imprisoned. Contact was made with the remaining six settlers, who had fled Hienghene. The six -- Raoul Lapetite and four of his sons, Jess, José, Jacques and Jean-Claude, along with adopted Melanesian son Robert Sineimène -- surrendered to the judge and were flown to Noumea where they too were charged with premeditated murder and imprisoned.

Almost two years later, the charges against all seven were dismissed on the grounds of self-defence and they were released from prison. The prosecution appealed this ruling and it was eventually overturned and a trial took place. The prosecution argued that the settlers had not acted in self-defence because there had been no direct aggression towards them by the Kanaks.

Two days after the initial dismissal of charges against the seven settlers, *Les Nouvelles* published a front-page photo of the seven posing in a line with the caption 'FREE... but it isn't finished'. The placing of the seven in the photo, most with arm around arm, suggested the type of solidarity and bonhomie of a football team, not a group who had admitted to participating in a massacre of horrific proportions and who purportedly regretted their actions.

Another photo of the 'line-up', this time less posed, appeared alongside a full-page story on page three along with two smaller photos, one of Maurice Mitride and Raoul Lapetite, and the second of Lapetite and one of his sons holding their dog 'Mustang'. The page three report was headed, "With freedom, the Mitride-Lapetites have rediscovered nature. Raoul, the patriarch, will continue writing his memoirs" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 2 October, 1986). The group photos reinforced this heading, set as they were in a garden setting with the group standing on a section of cropped grass flanked by forest. Until this point, there had been little discussion in the anti-independence media of the accused, except in the brief references to them as 'métis'. These photos and the page three article therefore largely introduced the settlers to the readership of *Les Nouvelles*, and the paper's characterisation of the settlers was carried forward into the defence depiction of them



during the trial which began on 19 October 1987. The proceedings lasted for 10 days. At the close of the trial, the jury deliberated for only a couple of hours (including the time to have a meal) and returned with a finding of not guilty on the grounds of self-defence.

Les Nouvelles presentation of the settlers as 'métis' was curious because they considered themselves European in spite of their partial Melanesian ancestry. In discussing Raoul Lapetite's ancestry, *Les Nouvelles* noted that the children of Raoul Lapetite's father and Melanesian mother were métissé, but added the qualification: "However, Raoul doesn't consider himself a métis today. He is European. For him, only the father counts -- descent is only paternal and excludes wives" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes* 20 October 1987). His self-identification as 'European' was shared by most children born of a 'European' father and Melanesian mother and brought up in the father's household. However, despite Lapetite's assertion of 'European' identity, little was made of his 'Europeanness' in *Les Nouvelles*, while considerable effort was vested in constructing his identity as 'métis'. As I argue below, this emphasis enabled the murderers to be presented as exemplars of 'la Calédonie profonde' and their Kanak political opponents as a

form of animal sub-species deserving of eradication.

In *Les Nouvelles*, the settlers, and 'patriarch' Raoul Lapetite in particular, were presented as men of 'nature' enamoured with the beauty of the forest and a lifestyle living in harmony with their natural surroundings. Thus, *Les Nouvelles* commented that the proximity of the forest, evident in the photos, was "propitious for a serene transition from incarceration to a life of freedom, for Raoul Lapetite above all, because he is a man of the earth, close to nature, trees, animals, which he has happily rediscovered" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*, 2 October 1986).

According to Lapetite, his first act as a free man was to "look at the trees. And then the flowers and the nature. But most of all the trees; the same kind that we have at our place, in the mountains...". The contrast between the depiction of the serenity of these men and their environment and the violence of the massacre in which they acknowledged that they participated is striking. Presumably, this contrast is instructive in seeking to demonstrate the out-of-character nature of their violent act and therefore to validate the thesis that they engaged in the massacre only because they were pushed beyond the limit of their (the image suggests) considerable tolerance by the insurrectionary activity being waged in the area by pro-independence Kanaks.

The defence's question to the jury in its summing up -- "In their place, what would you have done?" -- suggested that nothing distinguished these men from those in the jury who themselves were supposed to be the personification of reasonable citizenry. However, the presentation of the settlers was not merely that of common people but rather of exemplars of a particular vision of Caledonia - that of '*la Calédonie profonde*' -- for which the defence argued that it spoke during the trial.

The harmony, peacefulness and affinity with nature expressed in the discourse of '*la Calédonie profonde*' is clearly evident in the discourse on the identity of these settlers. Indeed, the similarities between the photos and their accompanying texts referred to above and the photo and text of '*la Calédonie profonde*' discussed earlier are striking. The settlers were posing on a domesticated space with a luxuriant natural backdrop, just as the farmer was glimpsed by the camera on a stretch of domestic space with a majestic backdrop of mountains in the distance. Both are colonial scenes in the representation of domesticated space -- the cut lawn and the cleared land -- and there are no barriers between this domesticated space and nature. The natural is, in fact, a progression of the colonial; there is no tension between the two, only harmony.

Colonialism has not only created domestic space; it has domesticated nature. Just as the harmony implicit in the discourse

of *la Calédonie profonde*' was exemplified in the old woman of European descent who had had two children with a 'canaque', the settler métis also personified this harmony: colonial citizens who, although métis, considered themselves European but for whom, "all their life was the bush, deer, hunting, the mountains, dogs" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*: 2 October, 1986).

This harmony was possible only in a world in which Kanaks were themselves domesticated and rendered tame and in the process denied human will and agency -- a world, in other words, which was effectively gutted of Kanaks as human agents. This vision was well expressed in *Les Nouvelles*' description of the area in which Mitride and the Lapetites lived as "the gentle Hienghene valley" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*: 2 October, 1986). This imaginative geography was possible only through a denial of the human existence of Kanaks whose articulations of their own history and struggle bespoke a far more brutal engagement with settlers.

When the defence evoked '*la Calédonie profonde*' during the trial it linked this imagining directly to the phenomenon of métissage. It was easy, the defence argued, to "present Caledonia as two communities in confrontation". Turning to the accused, one defence lawyer taunted: "Look at these white colonialists and you will understand the amplitude of the problem" (*Les Nouvelles Calédoniennes*: 30 October, 1987). Another defence lawyer reinforced this argument, exhorting the court room to: "Look at these white settlers! We haven't seen them on the front page of the Parisian intelligentsia's weeklies. Sineimène is almost blacker than Jean-Marie Tjibaou [The leader of the pro-independence movement]".

The defence's references to the physical characteristics of the accused as métis was presumably intended to support the argument which underpinned much anti-independence discourse that the confrontation over independence was not racially based. The lawyer's reference to the Parisian weeklies related to the anti-independence argument that the overseas press was seeking to present European settlers as racists by depicting the struggle as racially based.

For the defence, the prevalence of métissage within the European community belied this argument. Within this view, métissage attested to the intimacy of relationships forged between races, and the acceptance of métis as European demonstrated the depth of racial tolerance in the territory. The defence parodied what they considered was the overseas media view by ironically invoking the modest material circumstances of these settlers and their manifest métissage with the comment: "You know, they are rich, white colonialists, white, rich and oppressors".

The defence's evoking of métissage when referring to *la*

Calédonie profonde' once again gave sociological substance to a geographical imaginary grounded in notions of harmony and order. *La Calédonie profonde*'' was as much a place of interracial harmony as it was natural harmony, personified in the settler métis and expressed in their bonds of 'fraternity' with Melanesian communities. The emphasis placed in the anti-independence media and by the defence on the identity of the accused as métis attests to the believed efficacy of the argument that métissage proved that there was no racism in the territory and therefore no legitimate grounds for Kanak protest and militancy.

Prior to the Hienghene massacre and trial, the prevalent phenomenon of métissage had been relatively absent from scrutiny in public discourse. The media's subsequent foregrounding of it and its appropriating of this identity to anti-independence political discourse -- in particular, that of *la Calédonie profonde* -- signified a new rhetorical twist in the ideological struggle.

The massacre demonstrated how abjectly Kanaks were considered by those who actively opposed 'Kanak independence'. Having no recognition as rightfully human, the Kanaks returning in their trucks to their community could be ambushed and mowed down with bullets. The descriptions of the survivors of the brutality and relentlessness of the massacre is chilling and illustrated, as was argued in Bwenando, a pro-independence publication, "the horror of the events and their unfolding" (*Bwenando* 14 October, 1987). The pro-independence movement argued that the acquittal demonstrated that the "Kanak hunt was now open".

As Bwenando argued: "France is putting into place the legal tool which will allow, with impunity, the killing of Kanaks -- the perpetration of genocide against the Kanak people. The Kanak hunt is therefore open, but this hunt is not even regulated (the chasing of deer at night with lamps is prohibited) (*Bwenando*, November 1986)

Here, Bwenando was referring to evidence from survivors, which was denied by the accused, that the settlers used lamps to light up the fleeing Kanaks. In the pro-independence press there is repeated reference to this notion that the acquittal demonstrated that Kanaks were thought of not as animals but just as some form of animal sub-species. *Bwenando* referred to the recollection of one survivor that during the massacre "no head of cattle was wounded in the shooting", concluding that this demonstrated that "the life of a Kanak is worth less than that of a cow" (*Bwenando*, 17 November 1987).

Following the acquittal, one of the prosecution lawyers commented on the dignity of the families of the victims during the trial, particularly in the face of highly racist taunts from some

Europeans in the gallery, and referred to the comment during her evidence from one of the victim's wives that: "Mr President, you didn't see the bodies. Even when a deer is killed, it isn't massacred like that" (*Bwenando*, 17 November 1987).

A commentator writing in another pro-independence publication drew a similar parallel between Kanaks and hunted animals: "If poachers had organised a fraudulent night hunt on someone else's property and had killed 10 head of cattle, they would have been condemned. For 10 Kanaks, they are acquitted. It has to be stated: In New Caledonia, shortly after the referendum, a head of cattle is worth more than a Kanak skin (*L'Avenir Calédonien* 6 November 1987).

The racist taunts from some in the public gallery reinforced the perception among Kanaks that anti-independence extremists characterised them as a lower form of animal life. One of the prosecution lawyers referred to a comment from the gallery, heard when a survivor was showing the wounds on his stomach, that "next time we'll shoot you in the head, fucking monkey" (*Bwenando* 17 November 1987). Under the heading in a pro-independence publication, '*The fascist ambience*', other examples were given, including the comment from one member of a neo-fascist party at the opening of the trial that: "during the next 10 days I am going to have to breathe the odour of monkeys" (*L'Avenir Calédonien*, 6 November, 1987).

This mobilisation of the trope of the monkey underscores the notion of Kanaks as a failed form of humanity. This species coexisted through colonialism with Europeans and other races which had succeeded in making the evolutionary leap into humanity. Within this view, Kanaks were failed humans, and it was this failure which rendered them inferior to other animals, such as cattle, who were never in contention for an identification as human. In this regard, *Les Nouvelles'* photo of Raoul Lapetite and one of his sons posing with their dog, Mustang, is telling. The signs of affection displayed in this photo towards this loyal, domesticated creature, which, we are informed, left Hienghène with the settlers after the massacre, evoke a strong contrast with the depth of antagonism which must have engendered the massacre of Kanaks.

Perhaps, the loyal Melanesian who embraced the colonial imagining, expressed in '*la Calédonie profonde*', might have evoked similar affection. But Kanaks who wilfully sullied this imagining had reserved for them, at the hands of these settler métis, a level of brutality which shocked even many who opposed independence for the territory. As the prosecution argued: "The motive of the crime wasn't fear but hatred towards the Kanak people who dared revolt" (*Bwenando*, 17 November, 87).

The example of the reporting in *Les Nouvelles* on the Hienghene massacre and trial, and discourses associated with this reporting such as that of *la Calédonie profonde*, demonstrate the complexity of relationships between media reporting and social violence. It would be far too simplistic to say that the Hienghene massacre and what flowed from it were effects of the prominence given in *Les Nouvelles* to the discourses of the profound or true Caledonia.

But it would also be ludicrous to argue that these discourses were unrelated to the gruesome events in early December 1984. They contributed to the creation of a social imaging that served to legitimise acts of violence against Kanaks. Probably the most powerful feature of this social imagining was the subject positions or identities it articulated and in which many anti-independence activists found refuge and legitimation.

But its power was not only a result of the power of the newspaper. It also resulted from the effort vested by other anti-independence institutions in perpetuating this imagining. The congruence between the seemingly spontaneous arguments developed in *Les Nouvelles* and those of the defence during the trial demonstrates the existence of a relatively consensual reading of events within the anti-independence community. This reading derived from a type of anti-independence 'knowledge' that had been generated during the period of colonialism in New Caledonia through considerable discursive effort. Since its inception in 1971, *Les Nouvelles* was a very significant player in the development of this knowledge.

This analysis demonstrates the poverty of much of the debate on media and violence. In concentrating only on the social effects of overtly violent material, researchers adopting this approach to analyse *Les Nouvelles'* reporting would have overlooked a pretty picture of 'Caledonian serenity' and the capturing of an affectionate pose between a father, his son and their dog. Yet, these images are full of latent power and implicit violence. It is not the images themselves but the knowledges they sustain which is, as Foucault (1980) observed, the source of their power. ■

NOTES:

1. The conference was the First Pacific Communication Colloquium of Oceania, International Network of Universities of Communication, 7-11 December 1997. It was held in Noumea, New Caledonia.
2. A series of Government reports and committee proceedings on media and violence have been prepared in the United States, Britain and Australia during the past few years. The British and Australian reports

were prepared in the wake of much publicised violent incidents in both countries. The Newson Report (1994) in Britain was prepared after the James Bulger murder which was attributed in the popular media to its 10-year old perpetrators having watched the movie *Child's Play III* prior to the boy's abduction. Newson argued that media violence constitutes electronic 'child abuse' (cited in Buckingham 1997:33). In Australia, a Senate Select Committee Report on the Portrayal of Violence in the Electronic Media (1997) was prepared following the 'Port Arthur massacre'. In addition, the US Congress has initiated hearings into violence in video games (U.S. Congress 1994) and violent and demeaning imagery in popular music (U.S. Senate 1995). For a review of academic studies on media effects (see Vine 1997).

The Australian Senate Select Committee report contains several recommendations that program warning and censorship arrangements be improved. It also recommends 'that the Federal government fund a public education campaign through the media to make parents and teachers aware of the means (such as the classification symbols, the V-chip as it becomes available and PICS labelling on the Internet) available to them to control material that their children watch and play with.' (1997:vi).

The US Congress Sub-committee which heard evidence on violence in video games received written evidence from the American Medical Association which claimed: 'Research evidence suggests that those [children] who are heavy viewers of violence in the mass media demonstrate increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, the correlation between violence viewing and aggressive behaviour is fairly stable over time, place, and demographic characteristics. More importantly, naturalistic field studies and cross-national studies supported the position that the viewing of televised aggression leads to increases in subsequent aggression that can become part of a lasting behavioural pattern' (1994:31). As Vine (1997) and Buckingham (1997) point out, although there is evidence to support such strong claims on the existence of a strong causal relationship between violent media material and violence in society, there is also much evidence which refutes or qualifies these findings.

3. Vine (1997) notes that a study by Susan Hearold (1986) found that news footage had the greatest harmful impact whereas Paik and Comstock (1994) found that the impact of news and documentary material was weak (1997:139-40).
4. References to newspaper articles will be given in the text only.
5. The use of the term 'Kanak' in New Caledonia generally signifies a pro-independence Melanesian. Anti-independence Melanesians refer to themselves as 'Melanesian'.

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